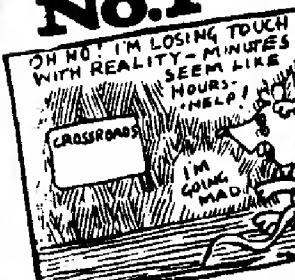


NO. 2

mega ETHIL THE MEGALOMANIA

No. 1



# MEGALOMANIA



megalon

Number 26

DEADLINE — 60TH JULY

Not really a  
POSTAL DIPLOMACY  
FANZINE AT ALL

No. 6

MR. DIPLOMATS

DAPPER

MEGALOMANIA

GAMES



MEGALOMANIA

MEGALOMANIA 7

Apologies for the mess, which is entirely typical of the conditions  
under which Megalomania is normally produced. This cover is

A Postal Fanzine

is now being split into two, one  
mainly of general interest, the  
other a Soccerball etc. zine.

MEGALOMANIA

LABOUR EXCHANGE

nothing to do with Howard Sayles

in fact, it's got nothing to do with anything!

EXCHANGE



# EDITORIAL

This issue is going to be late (so what else is new?). At this precise moment I'm not sure how late, so I'll save my excuses till later. In the last few days I've been thinking about this problem, and wondering how to solve it. Clearly it is not very satisfactory for me to continue taking about a fortnight to produce each issue: players

are justifiably annoyed at having to wait so long. It all stems from my lack of spare time, I guess - when I started Megalomania

I was at the Poly, then unemployed, followed by a few months in the DHSS, a spell back at college, and more unemployment. Throughout that period, it was quite feasible to get the whole zine done between Thursday and Tuesday, so that a four-week interval between deadlines worked very well. Since September, however, I've been working for John Menzies. My spare time is restricted to the period after 7 on weekdays, and the weekend. It doesn't need much to happen for the zine schedule to be disrupted, and hence the last few issues have all been late. My conclusion is that a 20-page zine every four weeks is just too much.

If I had complete freedom  
I do it, I wondered.....

to produce this thing how I wanted, how would

I suppose that I'd just type away to my heart's content, with articles, editorials, letters, zine reviews, Hobby news and general chat. Then, when there was enough material for one issue, I'd stick it together, write an introduction and endbit, and send it off to be printed. How often it would appear is difficult to judge: sometimes every three or four weeks, sometimes not for a couple of months - depending partially on when I could afford it.

Would it work?

Don't worry, I'm not about to start doing it, but I can see very strong arguments in favour of this method. What was it I said last time about zines being 'fun'? This way of producing zines is damn hard work, and I often wonder why I do it. Oh, sure, I enjoy it, but perhaps more as a challenge than anything else - there's a tremendous sense of fulfillment from doing this sort of thing: certainly doing it well. Sometimes, though, I wonder why. Not an easy question to answer at the best of times, that. One answer is that it probably impresses potential employers, in that I've actually done something - though obviously it doesn't impress them enough. Another answer is that other people presumably enjoy reading it, though that gets rather complex since a fanzine is really for the editor's benefit.

I suppose it'll remain one of the great unanswered questions. One sobering thought is that I'd be unlikely to do very much else in the time I use for Megalomania - I'd probably watch more TV, which would not be a good thing. I watch far too much as it is, even though I'm fairly selective. I could read the vast pile of unread books scattered about my room. I could do a hundred and one other things, but most of them would probably be extremely boring. gg

So, I guess things will continue as present. More editorial-type noises on p. 2C





This Month's Guest Columnist is the prominent Irish hobby figure SHAMUS O'FLEA, a well-known and respected expert on the game of Diplomacy. His views are his own, and not necessarily those of the editor.

My thanks to Chris for giving me this valuable space in Meg. I have had my differences with him on various matters, and even resorted to the rather snide trick of writing to another editor with my complaints. However, I also know how to crawl.

I'm going to use this article to talk about a few prominent hobby personalities, the people who are running the hobby for us.

ALAN PARR has apparently taken over the Zine Bank from Tim Roberts. Who is he? I've never heard of him, so he's obviously unsuited to the job. People might say that he's doing the job very well, but he's not in the mainstream of the hobby and that's all there is to it.

PAUL SIMPKINS has decided to run an Introductory Service based on flyers in the Diplomacy box. I rang him up a few weeks to check out a few personal details, and confess myself satisfied. I have a few reservations, but on the whole I think he has sufficient integrity to do the job.

You may remember RICHARD SHARP, who used to run the hobby, as General Secretary of the NGC. You are probably also aware that he has not produced an issue of Dolchstoss for nearly twelve months. His irresponsibility is staggering, and I find it incredible that he has not yet been publicly flogged for his midemanours. I am hoping that this will be put right at the next National Con.

Some people even have the nerve to defend Sharp, saying that he has done more for the hobby than anyone else, or point out that he hasn't had a very good eighteen months or so. Well, I suppose that being ill for most of Eurocon (and having to pay vast amounts for hospital care), being divorced, having to move out of Elm Close, suffering severe financial problems, fighting for the custody of his kids, getting re-married and moving back to Elm Close might be inconvenient, but he should get his priorities right.

Another miscreant who used to run the hobby is JOHN PIGGOTT. The story is depressingly similar to his friend Sharp's. The 23rd issue had to be dragged out of him by TRINGHAM, and published as part of Megalomania, some 4 months late. Issue 24 never did appear, as I knew it never would, and Piggott couldn't even be bothered to re-house the games. Piggott is a Civil Servant, and as such his behaviour is quite understandable, though no less reprehensible. Like Sharp, he has excuses aplenty, but the basic fact is that he has chosen to take his responsibilities as a husband and father more seriously than his responsibilities to the Diplomacy hobby. Can this be right?

Enough of this backbiting - how about singling out someone who deserves praise: PETER MEARNS. He has been running Puppet Theatre News for ten years now, no issue has ever been more than a day late, and he never makes mistakes in the Diplomacy games. (Surely this can't be right? --W. Deedsh) This makes the vendetta that the editors of certain large-circulation zines are pursuing against it all the more baffling. I think I shall write to the Pope, suggesting that Peter should be given a Sainthood. It's the very least he deserves.

That's it for now - I hope to be able to do this again some time, but until then I'll leave you with Megalomania.

Regards

Shamus

# DIARY

Back to the "Diary" format, once again (whatever Piggott may say) typed up in the period between Issue 25 and this one. Of course I don't always type up entries on the days to which they relate, but it isn't all made-up over the deadline weekend either.

*of a madman*

WEDNESDAY 5th MARCH: Another evening in the Lamb, now without doubt the in-group that its enemies claim it to be, as the same people are there time after time, and very few 'new' people have turned up - certainly none have returned. I now have

serious doubts about suggesting that people should turn up there to meet people, since others who have done so seem to have enjoyed it. The reasons are perhaps related to the personality of the average games player: I, like many others in the hobby, am basically fairly shy/introverted. However, once I've met people a couple of times this disappears: I now know all the people in the group that go to the Lamb, and feel at ease with them. When I first turned up at the meeting, I knew a fair number of the group anyway, so it's never been a problem for me. I do, however, well remember the first few hobby events I attended: notably GamesDay and Ronscon. At each of these I knew virtually no-one, and felt "left out" and spent long periods sitting around watching people enjoying themselves. Having got over that, I enjoyed parts of Ronscon and all subsequent cons very much indeed.

I suspect that had I come to the Lamb (or an equivalent event) instead, I would have felt "left out", probably gone home, and quite possibly not bothered again. Perhaps it is more logical for people only to come along with somebody they already know, but that rather defeats the object of the thing. It would also help if the place wasn't quite so packed, as that makes it very difficult to move around talking to a number of people. There's probably not an easy answer, but it is a problem. In spite of that, I'd say that the Lamb meets are working quite well.

SATURDAY 8th MARCH: On my way to work, I picked up a copy of Ode that was lying on the cold floor. Pausing only to notice that I had NMR'd in Mercator, I turned to the FA Cup Bourse and discovered that I had failed to invest in Aston Villa or Ipswich. This could upset my plans of winning the game. Rats.

I also noted that John (Marsden) is refusing to trade with Here We Go Again, a bi-monthly zine with no games, but happily offers a trade to Compendium (a quarterly zine with no games). He also says that people are unlikely to want to subscribe to HWGA, but fails to say that the same is true (and probably more so) for Compendium. If I were Steve Agar, I'd ~~kill myself~~ be feeling rather annoyed by the way that certain editors have condemned the thing without even seeing the first issue. It's certainly not something that I'd do!

In the afternoon, Palace beat Bolton 3-1, thus continuing their recent good run and even showing the form that won them the tag "team of the 80's". Hilaire must get into the England team on this form, as he's playing brilliantly: today he scored one and created another - what else does he have to do?

I was rather disappointed by the FA Cup results, as a Spurs-Ipswich cup final would have been a great advertisement for the game. As it is, West Ham are the only team left that might liven things up. It has, however, assured me victory in the Ode FA Cup Bourse, which is some consolation.

Back to Ode, and an attack on Richard Sharp that is probably justified. I have not really been in contact with Richard since October, when he seemed hopeful that an issue would appear before too long. As John points out, he has organized Eurocon in the last few weeks (and, incidentally, the name is not a complete misnomer - it is an extended 'con' in many ways, and the last three have been open to anyone with the time and money). If this year's isn't, that will only be because it has been filled with people from previous years (who obviously have priority)). John suggests that Richard has got his priorities wrong, putting Eurocon before

Dolchstoss. There are two problems here - was it a choice, and if so did he get his priorities wrong? I would suggest that it's not that simple - producing a zine requires more than just time. Anyway, I would argue that it's quite legitimate to put something like a holiday before a Diplomacy zine. Others would disagree. Basically, though, I have to agree with the general argument that John is advancing - Richard should return subs as he has offered to do, and make a definite decision on the future of Dolchstoss. It's not asking that much, is it?

SATURDAY 15th MARCH An incredible day at work - I've never seen so many people go so crazy: they seemed to be buying anything and everything! This Mother's Day nonsense has obviously gone to their heads, making them buy all sorts of rubbish. Are people really as gullible as they seem?

Palace drew 0-0 with Spurs, a good result but a bad game, and England beat Scotland to win the 5 Nations' Championship.

WEDNESDAY 19th MARCH Another meeting at the Lamb, once more down to the faithful few. Nick and Audrey Shears re-surfaced, though, and stayed almost to the end. The routine meal at the New Calcutta was made more interesting by the management's decision to give us a table just inside the door - Graham Box took revenge on their glassware, but Nick behaved himself - well, we didn't have any coffee. Yes, I know it's boring, but it's the best I can do.

SATURDAY 22nd MARCH I actually got to watch Tiswas this morning - still as good as ever. Then John Miller arrived for a Crassstalk editorial conference. In the afternoon, Palace drew 1-1 with Arsenal, though they would have won if Gerry Francis could score penalties.

Did anyone else watch the Ayatollah Friedman's programme on BBC-2? He's very good at diverting criticism away from his eccentric analysis, and seemed to be getting assistance in that respect from Peter Jay (who is both an economist and an opponent of Friedman's policies). Strange...

Progress on Megalomania is fitful, to say the least, and it's obvious that this is going to be another late issue.

SUNDAY 23rd MARCH was uneventful, though the production of Megalomania is still slow - I had to tidy my room to check that I haven't lost any orders!

MONDAY 24th MARCH is my birthday, which is another excuse for this being late.

WEDNESDAY 26th MARCH. Budget Day, and Howe did what was expected of him - mainly because it had been "leaked" in advance, with the minimum amount of subtlety, by the Treasury. No-one who voted Tory should complain about this budget, as it follows the policies Thatcher stands for: clobbering the poor, sick and unemployed to make the rich better off - I'm glad to see that the threshold for Capital Transfer Tax has been raised; that'll enable me to rest easy in my bed tonight!

Am I right, or am I right, in saying that the Tories specifically denied that they would be increasing prescription charges? If I recall correctly, it featured in that Conservative Central Office Press Release that became the front page of the Daily Mail in April last year. A remarkably courageous decision by Sir Geoffrey. I read that it is supposed to relieve the pressure on GPs to prescribe for every patient. Will someone explain this logic to me?

It would be very interesting to find out whether the Tories would have won if they made specific proposals such as this in their manifesto. If not, how can they claim to have mandate from the people for them?

It's a pity that my resident Tory poodle has stopped subbing, cos I'd like to hear some answers.

Did I say that I wasn't going to write anything more about politics? Dunno. I'll make an exception for the Budget - I really don't want to start another thoroughly boring political debate. I doubt if anyone's going to change my opinions, particularly about this government.

## 6.

THURSDAY 27th MARCH Greatest Hits arrives. A fairly ordinary issue, though there's one excellent article - the Birks guide to University teaching. He's taken a serious guide for new Tutors at the South Bank Adult Education and adapted it...

'Arrive five minutes after seminar is due to start. Make entrance as spectacular as possible. Dark glasses, a leather jacket and narrow 'Mod' tie should be sufficiently intimidating to establish superiority.'

Hmm... I spend three years at South Bank Poly (a different establishment), and most of the lectures were so boring that I studied teaching techniques rather than listening to the lecturers. Much of what Pete says undoubtedly rings true, and we had a few lecturers who adopted the same approach as he does. In fact we had one whose voice bore an uncanny resemblance to Birks', and even had similar untidy handwriting! I thought that he was one of the best lecturers we had, though I know that a lot of people found it difficult to keep up - because, for some reason they expected to be able to write everything down. Never having seen Pete lecture, I don't know how he does it, but I would assume that he would have a similar approach.

I found most of the teaching to be pretty poor, since lecturers just repeated the material in textbooks, rather than adding any new or original thoughts. I can't see the point of doing that, but I suppose that it's a lot easier. Enough - read GH!

Other news from GH is that Greg Hawes is getting married, and to that end is becoming engaged on Easter Monday. How the mighty are fallen, and all that - all these people settling down and getting married. The Diplomacy hobby is becoming elderly, and the only way that's going to change is if a load more much younger people are recruited. I will then complain about postal Snakes & Ladders, and say that the hobby is getting too juvenile....

FRIDAY 28th MARCH is my day off, which gives me a chance to type up more of this drivel. I'm off on the job application roundabout again, and am being considered again for a job that I very nearly got last year - having been shortlisted, but losing out because the other two had experience: this for a "Trainee Journalist" post. C'est la vie, and all that. Interviews are almost as fascinating as lectures, but Ken Bain has covered the subject entertainingly in NMR, so I won't go on.

I'm still at Menzies, incidentally, over-worked and underpaid, doing anything that the manager tells me - everything from counting/ordering/moving cigarettes to shifting large boxes of Mars bars. Last week, I repaired a typewriter using a pair of scissors, a length of fishing line, a pen refill and a table knife. Don't ask how..... Next week we're having an Ice Cream counter installed (no, really), and I've a pretty shrewd idea who's going to have to work on (don't laugh). It's a hard life.

SATURDAY 29th MARCH. Actually, as I write it's tomorrow - working in the morning, Palace vs. Manchester United in the afternoon, the National, and poker chez Birks in the evening. Oh, and a tube strike. Should be fun. I'm off to watch "Soap" now.

Well, Palace lost 2-0 to Manchester United, mainly because of their forwards' inability to score. United didn't impress me at all - they looked a very ordinary side, with a poor defence, and I really can't see them winning the Championship. Palace should have beaten them, and on balance probably deserved a win, but there are still serious things wrong with the side: Flanagan is playing terribly, for example. I wonder whether it's actually much simpler - when Hilaire has a bad game, Palace have a bad match? Dunno.

I actually did reasonably well in Pete's poker game, though I was up most of the night playing in order to do so. Eee, it's a hard life. Remarkably, there now seems to be too much material for this issue, so my scholarly piece on the state of the hobby is going to get the chop. One month I'll actually type up the right number of pages, really I will.



7.

Right, well let's start with a new gamestart:

GAME FIFTEEN 80?? Gamestart GM:John Dodds

ENGLAND: Brian Elsey, 11 Conyers Grove, Darlington,  
Co. Durham

SW9

GERMANY: Conrad Romney, 92 Home Park Rd, London/

RUSSIA: Bill Brakes, 49 Hill Rise, Swindon Park, Luton  
Bedfordshire

TURKEY: Norman Melvin, 44 Sunneyside Road, Teddington, Middlesex.

AUSTRIA: Chris Barr, 12 Standview Street, Stranmillis Road, Belfast 7

ITALY: Malcolm Jones, 98 Brook Green, London W6 7DD

FRANCE: Andy Tringham, 25 Auckland Road, London SE19 2DR ((kinda familiar))

Your GM is John Dodds, at 20 Woodvale Road, DARLINGTON, Co. Durham till 9th April (0325 65901), and at Christ's College, CAMBRIDGE, CB2 3BU from 10th April for a couple of months. Mail sent to the wrong address should be forwarded, but there's bound to be a delay so you'd be silly to rely on it. Orders sent to me will probably not be forwarded very quickly (if at all), and there's always the risk that Andy will see them. This is John's game, and my part in it will be fairly minor - merely publishing the adjudications - so, please don't ring me up to complain when John loses your A(Tyr). The Megalomania House Rules apply (the only significant deviation from "accepted practice" being that they follow the (1971) Rules of Diplomacy and don't remove people for failing to send orders).

IMPORTANT: Anyone who hasn't confirmed that they wish to play (by sending orders, preferably) by the next deadline will be replaced. A double deadline is only available if there's a particularly good reason for having one (such as Darlington being Napalmed by the RAF - in a training exercise, of course)..

Right, well may the best player win - well if not the best, the most convincing liar. Please send your orders to John at Cambridge.

GAME ONE 78DD Spring 1911

GERMANY A(Sil)-Ber; A(Mun) S A(Sil)-Ber; F(StP)-Fin; F(Nor)-SKA  
Charlie Pinel

RUSSIA A's(Boh, Mos, Lvn, War) stand unordered  
Rick O'Fee?

TURKEY A(Tyr)-Pie; A(Tri)-Vie; xA(Ven) S A(Tyr)-Pie; A(Apu)-Tri;  
Tim Davison A(Rom) S A(Ven); F(ADR) C A(Apu)-Tri; F(Nap) S A(Rom)  
F(ION) S F(Nap); F(AEG)-Con; F(EMS)-ION

FRANCE F(Tun) S F(TYS); F(TYS) S F(Tus); F(Tus) stands; A(Pie) S F(Tus)  
Phil Bass F(GOL) S A(Pie); F(Mar)-Spa:sc; A(Gas)-Mar; A(Par)-Bur;  
A(Bur)-Ruh; A(Kie) S A(Bur)-Ruh; F(Bre)-ENG; F(Hol)-NTH;  
F(NWG) S F(Hol)-NTH; A(Swe)-Nor

London Calling: What's the fun in this - I want some blood!

Tim - Rick: Are you still there?

Vienna - Moscow: I will make my exit as soon as possible.

London Calling: There must be something wrong - I don't seem to have made any mistakes in this game last season, and it has appeared in successive issues!!

GAME TWO 78DE Autumn 1910

TURKEY A(Swe)-Den; A(Fin)-Swe, A(Lvn) S A(StP); A(StP) S A(Lvn);  
 Derek Forrest A(Pru) S A(Lvn); A(Sev)-Mos; F's(BLA, WMS, Smy) & A(Bul) stand  
 ITALY A(Mun)-Kie; A(Tun) stands; F(Mar) S F(GOL)-Spa:sc; A(Pie) S F(Mar);  
 Richard Merrett F(GOL)-Spa:sc; A(Boh)-Mun; A(Sil) S A(Boh)-Mun; F(NAf)-MAO;  
 A(Ber) S A(Mun)-Kie

FRANCE (Derek Staples?) A's(Gas, Spa\*, Bur, Ruh, Kie\*) F's(GOB, Bre, MAO, BAL  
 Por) all stand.

Adjustments:

T: 13 centres: Con, Ank, Smy, Bul, Ser, Rum, Sev, Mos, War, StP, Nor, +Swe, +Den  
 Builds A(Ank), F(Con)  
 I: 13 centres: Ven, Rom, Nap, Tun, Gre, Vie, Bud, Tii, Mar, Ber, Mun, +Spa, +Kie  
 No Builds Ordered - 4 short  
 F: 8 centres: Par, Bre, Spa, Por, Lon, Lpl, Edi, Spa, Dek, Kie, Hol, Bel.

GAME SEVEN 78ET Autumn 1909

GERMANY (Peter Tassell): F(NAO)-MAO; F(NWG)-BAR; A(Nor)-StP; F(NTH)-ENG;  
 F(MAO)-Spa:sc; A(Gas) S F(MAO)-Spa:sc; A(Bur) S A(Mun);  
A(Ber)-Sil; A(StP)-Mos; A(Sil)-Mos; A(Mun) S A(Sil)-Boh

RUSSIA (Anarchy): A(War) stands

TURKEY (Derek Forrest): A(Arm)-Smy

AUSTRIA (Andrew Brierley): F(Ank) stands; A(Con)-Bul; F(Smy) stands;  
 A(Lvn) S Russian A(War); A(Mos) S A(Lvn); A(Boh) S A(Gal)-Sil;  
 A(Tyr) S A(Boh); A(Gal)-Sil; A(Ukr)-Sev; A(Rom)-Nap; A(Ven)-Rom

ITALY (Graham Healey): A(Mar) stands; A(Pie) S A(Mar); F(ADS)-ION;  
 F(ION)-TYS

Adjustments:

G: 15 centres: Ber, Kie, Mun, Hol, Bel, Den, Swe, Nor, Lon, Lpl, Edi, StP, Par,  
 Bre, +Spa Builds F(Kie) and 3 short  
 R: 1 centre: War No change  
 T: 0 centres: Ank and finally OUT -- removes A(Arm)  
 A: 14 centres: Vie, Bud, Tri, Ser, Rum, Con, Sev, Smy, Mos, Bul, Ven, +Rom,  
 +Nap, +Ank Builds F(Tri), A(Vie), A(Bud)  
 I: 4 centres: Rbh, Nap, Tun, Mar, Spa, Por, Gre n/c

Munich: Welcome back, Graham!

Italy - Germany: What happened to all those fleets of mine?

APOLOGY

You will notice that some of the games are missing from this issue. This is because I don't have complete sets of orders, and am not sure whether it's my fault or the players' - I will endeavour to sort them out and enclose adjudications. Game 6 is held over because no-one seems interested any more. I will propose a 2-way draw between Austria and Turkey: if it is rejected, I will continue with the orders I already have on file. Game 11 is held over because I forgot to underline some failed moves. The rest should continue immediately, so check for a carbon-copy adjudication in the envelope.

There is a new waiting list - Peter McDonald is the only person on it at the moment. The game will be run by John Dodds, but adjudications will appear in Megalomania, and gamefees, applications, preference lists and so forth should go to me.

GAME NINE 78GI Spring 1906

9.

ENGLAND (Russ Tulp): F's(Lon, NTH\* NWG\*) & A(Den) stand u/o \*F(NTH) dead

GERMANY (Andrew Seaborne): F(Ber), A's(Kie, Mun) stand u/o

TURKEY (Chris Farmer): A(Nor)-Swe; A(Mos)-StP; A(War)-Sil; A(Sev)-Ukr; A(Rum) stands; F(BLA) S A(Rum); A(Bul)-Gre; F(Gre)-ION; F(ION)-Nap F(Smy)-AEG; A(Con)-Bul; F(TYS) S French F(Nap)-Rom

AUSTRIA (Cliff Kennedy): A(Ser)-Gre; F(ADS)-Ven; A(Vie)-Tyr; A(Bud) S It A(Gal)

ITALY (John Langley): A(Gal) & A(Rom) stand

FRANCE (Ian McIntyre): A(Bel)-Ruh; A(Hol) S A(Bel)-Ruh; A(Par)-Bur; F(Pic)-Bel; F(ENG)-NTH; F(Edi) S F(ENG)-NTH; A(Pie)-Tus; F(Nap)-Rom A(Mar)-Pie; F(Bre)-MAO

Vienna: "Rally on me! Rally on me!" the Archduke cried, "and we shall defeat the Franco-Turkish hordes". But, on turning around to see who had answered the call, the Archduke found himself alone. "Bloody cartels" he murmured to himself as he retired to the Palace to look up the "situations vacant" column in the local newspaper.

GAME TWELVE 79DZ Autumn 1904

ENGLAND (Howard Sayles): F(NTH)-Den; F(Den)-Kie; A(Swe)-Nor; F(NAO)-Cly; F(ENG) S F(Edi)-NTH; F(Edi)-NTH

GERMANY (Simon Langley): F(Hol) S French A(Bur)-Bel; A(Ber)-Sil; A(Mun) S A(Ber)-Sil; A(Kie) S Russian F(BAL)-SKA (!! Illegal and NSO !!)

RUSSIA (Geoff Willis ?) A's(Sil, Ukr) & F(BAL) stand

TURKEY (Derek Forrest): A(Ser)-Rum; A(Bul)\* S A(Ser)-Rum; A(Syr)-Arm A(Smy)-Con; F(Con)-BLA \*A(Bul) annihilated

AUSTRIA (Peter Tassell): A(Alb)-Tri; F(Gre)-Bul:sc; A(War)-Mos; A(Bud)-Ser; A(Rum) S F(Gre)-Bul:sc

ITALY (Dave Parry): F(AEG) S Austrian F(Gre)-Bul:sc; F(ION)-Gre; A(Apu) stands; A(Ven) stands.

FRANCE (John Lee): F(MAO)-Bre; A(Par)-Bre; A(Gas)-Bur; A(Bur)-Bel

Adjustments:

E: 6 centres: Lon, Lpl, Edi, Nor, Den, Swe no change

G: 4 centres: Mun, Kie, Ber, Hol, Bel, Pat

R: 3 centres: StP, Mds, War, Sev

T: 4 centres: Con, Ank, Smy, Bul, Ser

A: 6 centres: Vie, Bud, Tri, Gre, Rum, +Bul, +Mos Builds A(Vie)

I: 5 centres: Ven, Rom, Nap, Tun, +Gre Builds F(Nap)

F: 6 centres: Mar, Bre, Spa, Por, +Par, +Bel Builds F's(Bre, Mar)

For Sale or Rent: Two as new Italian Armies, never used, still with shiny new equipment. MUST GO. Owner leaving country.

France - Germany: For Belgium, I might be persuaded.

France - England: No hostile intentions - I just want to make sure you don't change your mind.

Italy - France: What's up? Forgotten how to write?

Anonymous: Forgotten? Looking at Voice, and his press, he never knew in the first place. (Not me, John)

GAME FOURTEEN 80BG Spring 1901

ENGLAND F(Edi)-NWG; F(Lon)-NTH; A(Lpl)-Yor  
 Les Tassell 'Northern Opening' 36.3% of English Sol's, and 31% of English wins.

GERMANY F(Kie)-Den; A(Mun)-Ruh; A(Ber)-Kie  
 Andy Davidson 'Blitzkrieg' 41.6% / 51.6%

RUSSIA F(StP:sc)-GOB; F(Sev)-BLA; A(Mos)-Ukr; A(War)-Gal  
 Howard Sayles 'Southern Defence' 22% / 24%

TURKEY A(Con)-Bul; A(Smy)-Arm; F(Ank)-BLA  
 John Gallacher 'Russian Attack' 32.1% / 55.5%

AUSTRIA F(Tri)-Ven; A(Vie)-Gal; A(Bud)-Ser  
 John Piggott 'Southern Hedgehog' 2.8% / 3%

ITALY A(Ven)-Tri; F(Nap)-ION; A(Rom)-Apu  
 Patrick Thompson 'Lepanto?' 5.3% / 4%

FRANCE F(Bre)-Pic; A(Par)-Bur; A(Mar)-Spa  
 Roy Egginton 'Belgian Gambit' (of sorts) 1.5% / -

London Calling: The statistics are from the out-of-date Spring 1901 Opening Moves Survey, compiled by Mick Bullock and published in New Statsman, his Diplomacy stats zine - 14, Nursery Avenue, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX3 5SZ.

The names come from "The Game of Diplomacy" by Richard Sharp (Arthur Barker £7.50), except for the French opening, which is not mentioned.

Obviously, the "best" openings are the ones that give the greatest chance of success - the Turkish and German in this case. Since the figures are historical, they are of limited value, but I find them interesting nevertheless.

Austria has the best reasons to feel satisfied, since he has successfully prevented two attacks that could have been fatal, whilst France's eccentric opening makes the position around Belgium very interesting. I suppose that suggesting probable alliance structures would be GM interference, so I'll keep quiet. I will observe that one player was very fortunate not to NMR, though.....

DS2 78DA Autumn 1905

ENGLAND (Peter Calcraft?) A(Lpl) stands ((F(NWG) actually disappeared in A04))

GERMANY A(Pol)-S A(Mun)-Bul; A(Pic) stands unordered; F(NTH) S F(Hol)-Bel  
 Tom Tweedy A(Ruh) S F(Hol)-Bel; A(Sil)-War; A(Swe)-Nor; F(Hol)-Bel; A(Mun)-Bur.

RUSSIA F(Nor)-NWG; F(GOB) stands; F(BAR) stands; F(Arm)-BLA;  
 Ian Gibson F(Ank) stands; A(Rum) S A(Ser); A(Ser) S A(Rum)

TURKEY F(Gre) S A(Con)-Bul; A(Con)-Bul; F(AEG)-Con; A(Apu)-Ven;  
 Peter Hickman F(Nap) S French F(TYS)-Rom

AUSTRIA A(Tri) S A(Bud); A(Bud) stands; A(Ven) S A(Rom); A(Rom) stands\*  
 Steve Agar \*A(Rom) disbands.

FRANCE F(ION)-ADS; F(TYS)-Rom; F(GOL)-TYS; A(Par)-Bre; A(Bur)-Par  
 Roger Collins F(Lon)-NTH; F(ENG) S A(Bel) ((ns)); A(Bur)-Par; A(Bel)-Hol\* (dead)

Adjustments:

E: 2 centres: Lpl, Edi One short

G: 9 centres: Mun, Ber, Kie, Swe, Den, Hol, +Bel, +War, +Nor Blds F(Kie)

R: 6 centres: StP, Mos, War, Sev, Rum, Bul, +Bel, Ser, +Ank Remove F(GOB)

T: 5 centres: Con, Ank, Smy, Bul, Gre, Nap

A: 4 centres: Tri, Vie, Ven, Bul, +Bud Builds A(Vie)

F: 8 centres: Par, Bre, Mar, Spa, Por, Bel, Tun, Lon, +Rom

# LETTERS

Right, well having attacked A Voice in the Wilderness last time, John Lee obviously deserves a chance to reply. I'll print it without interruption, and almost in full - mainly because I think it's an interesting letter anyway.

JOHN LEE      Thanks for M25 and the attempted hatchet Aberystwyth job. If nothing more interesting comes along before the next issue of Voice is due,

I may comment there. Quite what I'll find to say, apart from the obvious fact that you don't like press and Dip

articles((1)), is a little beyond me, though. Perhaps you and Don Brown should get together?

A few comments on the review "...that's not the critic's problem." What trash! What's the point of the review if it isn't constructive (which it isn't)? ((2)) You don't like the way we write, huh? Well, that's just tough, isn't it. If all the letters I received said the same as yours then I might take note, but they don't of course. ((3)) As to the press and Dip articles; only Steve Plater shares your views on press, and a few more editors, no readers though (=subscribers), on the Dip. ((4)) As I'd printed the quiz I felt obliged to supply the answers, even though I didn't agree with them all. Still as you weren't interested in the comp it's only to be expected that you wouldn't want the answers.

A comparison with NMR! ? Hmm, about the only thing I agree with you on is the front cover. The nuclear power was a cheap imitation of Plater's efforts, with the letter col going over the same old stuff. I do agree that NMR! has potential, but I wouldn't say it was there yet. ((5))

A theory that I may well develop in Voice is that of the dynamic zine. My view is that to remain interesting a zine has to keep developing. Whether you agree or not, the general consensus seems to be that Voice is still developing. That's fine by me. I'm in no great rush to become famous or take over the hobby. OK, you would say that newish zines are still developing. To some degree yes, though I don't think Ode has really started yet. It probably will, so watch for it to happen. Of the zines you seem to like, none appear to fall into this category. Personally I have never understood GH's popularity. It's not my style, which is fair enough. Putty Riffo and Tantalus just don't manage to enthrall me at the moment, while I find FOE much more interesting. Why? Well, because it still manages to generate enthusiasm which the above don't. How much more interesting to read about the latest attempts to re-secure the Dip box flyer and attempts to fool everyone, about the production of non-existent zines, than the boring squabbles that exist elsewhere.

Time for a word on Meg itself. Much as I hate to say this, for a year ago this was definitely my favourite zine, Meg has gradually gone down in my estimation. The main reason is, of course, the GMing. I notice that on the cover of issue one (that you've reprinted) it says "A Postal Diplomacy Fanzine". That, basically, is a joke. I can't remember a single month when I haven't had to report some GMing error - surely you must have got Spring 1901 right? ((not always!!)) I see your answer is to fetch in an outside GM. How pathetic! Looks like the old argument of a workman and his tools is about to set in to me. ((What does this mean? I'd like to know, but at the moment it makes no sense at all to me.)) I'll wait and see though.

The turnaround is also pathetic. Considering you don't do the printing yourself, it shouldn't take any more time than it does for the rest of us. ((??)) I suspect what's missing is dedication. When did you say you were going to fold? ((issue 100))

Time to look at Meg 25 directly. Without a doubt not one of your better issues. Besides your attempted reviews, the thing was basically dominated by letters. 'Decent GMs know when to give up' (from Letter Col). Ha Ha Ha! Basically the sort of boring letters I dislike - they must be, I see some of my stuff has crawled it's way in there. More attempts to justify inflation - pointless; it exists and we all know

about it - ((Pardon. Am I being dense, or is it John?)) and your house rules. Face it, if you believed in them there wouldn't have been any debate in the first place. The games gain just over a side, and include the customary errors. What else? Some good artwork (of course) from Howard and some trash coppied from Knife and Fork. That, basically, was that. Still, with the zine poll coming up I've no doubt that things will show definite signs of improvement in the next couple of months. No doubt a few publicity-seeking, controversial, zine reviews will grace the pages before long. As you'll need all the publicity you can get on present form, I'll try to remember to give you a mention - I can't be bothered with a hatchet-job, so you can rest easy. The only thing I ask for is a clear statement on where Meg is going from here. OK?

CT: Thanks, John, for a great letter. There's so much in it that demands a reply, most of which I disagree with, that this looks likely to take up most of the lettercol.

Before wading in, I'll make a few observations on the argument. In Meg 25, I spent a couple of pages explaining my views on Diplomacy zines: saying, essentially, that there's room for all sorts of zines, but that it should be done well. I produced Voice as an example of a zine that isn't very good - terrible might be more appropriate. John seems to believe that my real reason for disliking Voice is that I don't like the genre, which is obviously an easier thing for him to accept, when the whole point of the article was to say the opposite! Re-read it, John!

He then goes on, logically enough, to say that he doesn't like the style of zine that I produce - though does it rather strangely, merely proving that I'm not producing the sort of fanzine that he'd like to produce!! Weird, huh?

The numbered points: 1. I enjoy good press and interesting articles on Diplomacy

2. A critic does not have to tell the performer/writer how to do his job, but does say why he is/isn't succeeding. It is up to the writer to make use of the review - a good review is an honest and well-thought-out review. It is only constructive if the writer takes heed of the advice offered.

3. I'm in the minority, so I'm wrong, eh? I dispute both statements, and the logic that takes you from one to the other.

4. Again you fall into the trap of equating rightness with majority opinion. I know that some of your subscribers enjoy the Diplomacy articles, cos they've told me so, but that doesn't alter my opinion (nor should it, as I hope you would agree). As someone who has read a large number of articles on Opening Theory, I would suggest that yours are some of the worst. But then I suppose a pint of lager would taste very good to a man dying of thirst..... Or is that your argument?

5. Obviously we disagree on the merits on NMR! Fair enough.

On to your comments about Megalomania. Calling it "A Postal Diplomacy Fanzine" is not a joke (if that's your idea of a joke, I can see why Voice is so dull!) - it may not be the description you would choose, but I'm sure it is the most appropriate description available. It is, after all, about the Postal Diplomacy Hobby. My apparent inability to run Diplomacy games competently worries me greatly, and an outside GM is the only realistic solution. I assume that you would prefer me to continue as now, and hope that the problem will go away. Now that really would be "pathetic", and you'd have every right to criticise me.

I don't think I need your sympathy for my turnaround problems, which are (I hope) fairly temporary. As for dedication, I suggest that you wait till you've produced twenty-five issues in two years, ranging from a minimum of 16 to a maximum of 24 pages, on your own, before telling me I lack dedication. Incidentally, producing a 24-page issue does take rather more time and effort than half (or less) of a considerably smaller zine. I would have thought that was obvious, but presumably not.

Is this bit about inflation another joke? I can find nothing on this (actually quite interesting) subject in any of the copies of issue 25 that I have! The debate on my

house rules demonstrates only that other people have different opinions, and a right to express them. Should I ignore them - and if I did, would that prove that I'm right and they're wrong? (It's also about Diplomacy, or hadn't you noticed that?)

I'm intrigued to know what "trash" I 'copied' from Knife & Fork (though I can't actually be bothered to search through the untidy pile of zines to my right to find out) - I assume that he has used one of the cartoons (or one similar) in an old issue of the crypto-fascist K & F. Am I right?

Everybody (well, two or three people) tell me that the Zine Poll will force me to improve the zine. And there was I, thinking that, I was bound to win it anyway. If (a) I knew when the ZP was going to be announced and (b) was capable of producing a popular/vote-winning fanzine (or even issue), I suppose I might think about it. Seriously, though, I'm trying to please myself and my subscribers - if I do well in the Zine Poll that's a bonus, but it's not worth sacrificing the main objective to do so.

Where is Megalomania going? Sorry, there's no grand strategic plan (I was working on the basis of World Domination by Friday Week, but I'll have to stay in to watch "Soap", so it's been put off for a few weeks). All I can do is produce each issue to the best of my abilities. I can't fit in with the "4-week deadline/3-day turnaround" school of zine production, so I've given up trying. Each issue will appear as soon after the deadline as I can manage - I don't intend to kill myself by doing it too quickly, or truncate it to cut the turnaround. If you don't like it, there are numerous other zines that have different priorities - I happen to believe that I am now doing what I'm best at. I see no reason to try producing what would rapidly become a second-rate "standard" Diplomacy zine, which is presumably the alternative.

I'd be interested to debate the relative merits of different approaches to zine production, but argued more logically and convincingly, and not based entirely on established practice.

I'd also like to hear serious criticisms of the content of Megalomania as well, since I keep reading rather vague comments in various zines from people who don't seem entirely happy: it is, however, rather difficult to work out exactly why!

When I say that John's was a "great letter", I mean that it has inspired me to write all that. I was disappointed that he failed to argue his case logically or convincingly, since a good feud would have livened things up rather. Neither can I find anyone who disagrees with my review (a snap poll at the Lamb last night produced: unheard-of unanimity), though I do have a rather strange letter from my brother, which is worth printing for its quite remarkable line of argument.

STEVE TRINGHAM Your attacks on PV and Voice are both grossly overstated and uncalled-for. They may not be in the zine 'superleague' (of which you apparently feel Meg is the founder member), but they are NOT rubbish, nor should be described in the way you choose '....I'm afraid the simple truth is that neither of them have a clue how to do it.'

I trade with both John and Mike, and can truthfully say that I look forward to receiving both their efforts. Now, I'm not claiming that either is the best zine in the country, but your superior toned "put-down" meted out in Meg 25 bears little resemblance to the constructive criticism you claim to make. Mike may not 'have direction' (??), but that does not mean that the zine falls 'below the level of competence....'

So why am I defending these two zines. You undoubtedly produce one of the top zines in the hobby. What makes it a good zine is that i (a) interesting, (b) informative and (c) fairly reliable. You can influence many people's opinions: if you misuse that influence by representing an untrue or incomplete picture then you not only destroy your reader's confidence in what you write, but also damage the hobby as a whole. You surely care whether the hobby continues to flourish, as such you have a responsibility. (??) Why no mention of the great improvement in PV

over the last few months? When I first saw PV I gave it six months before it would fold (( I'll give it five)). If it had continued in the same way, I doubt if it would have lasted that long, but Mike has improved both his style and content, and now makes far better use of the production facilities he has available. So why not offer encouragement. By all means criticise, but give praise where it is due also.

Voice is a zine which seems to have great potential - was there no way you could have tried to help Jeremy and John realise that potential, instead of the pointless haranguing you delivered?

Sorry to go on, but you will devalue your own opinions if you continue to mete out this kind of pathetic 'zine review'. All that having been said, I still enjoy reading Meg, and would certainly sub if I didn't see it anyway. May it reach issue 50.

CT: Where to start. My defence of the Voice review rests, I suppose, on the basis that I must give both good and bad reviews - there's no point in doing one without the other, as far as I'm concerned anyway. If I like a zine I say so, with reasons, so if I don't I must logically do the same thing. I believe that is far more honest than ignoring bad zines, which is what many editors do instead, or even giving neutral reviews (damning by faint praise, and all that).

I strongly contest your claim that I am damaging the hobby, and could even argue the reverse - on the grounds that the hobby is harmed by awful zines, and we would be better off without them - though I don't think that applies to any zines currently produced (though Shenandoah Services comes very close). I am certain that zine reviews are, in principle, very beneficial to the hobby: I do more zine reviews than most. The defence rests.

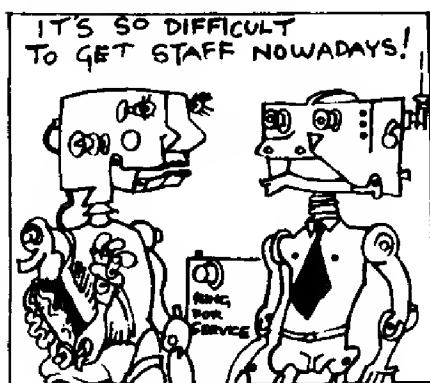
I would hope that no-one will take my word for it, but take the trouble to check out any zines that I review before judging them. I don't want to be in a position where Megalomania is too influential for me to express personal opinions, nor do I think it likely.

As far as I can see, you are saying that Voice and PV aren't very good, but that I should not be critical of them - apparently on the grounds that they either have improved or are likely to do so in the future. I find this a remarkable argument, and will vigorously defend my right to express honest opinions forcefully, whoever I might offend thereby.

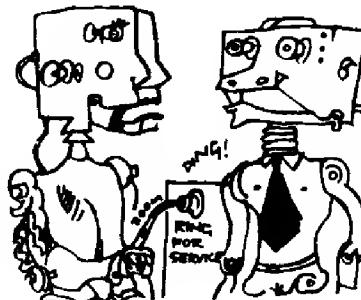
I must say that I was perhaps a little unfair to Mike Allaway - Pyrrhic Victory has a lot more going for it than Voice, and clearly satisfies a lot of people: John Miller has been singing the praises of its Soccer League and 'Vote' games. That doesn't alter my opinion of the zine, but it seems only fair to make the point: and I reckon it's a far better argument than any of Steve's. Miller, incidentally, alleges that I only like "middle class" zines, and dislike PV because it is "working class". If by middle class he means literate and intelligent, then yes, certainly.

THE ROBOTSONS .

HEATH



AND WHEN YOU DO GET THEM.....



JONATHAN P.R. PALFREY I see Pete Birks going on again about 'four bores Kenilworth, Warwickshire hunched over a table ignoring everyone else' and claiming that he doesn't like games players. Hmm, seems to me that if someone is a bore then it's much more sensible and public-spirited of him to play games than to attempt to make conversation. And, let's face it, few people can make interesting conversation to order.

There seems to be a belief in certain quarters that if two or three are gathered together in a pub, a miracle will occur and they will become mutually fascinating. Having never observed this miracle, I remain sceptical. It's my observation that most people don't do anything very interesting, and are therefore rarely inspired to say anything very interesting. This isn't because people are inherently dull (I believe that people are all potentially interesting) but because they lead dull lives. The waste of human potential is, and always has been, staggering.

I agree that games are not a solution to this problem: they're not a good topic of conversation, and they probably don't make people much more interesting. However, a good game is enjoyable in its own right, which is more than can be said for a lot of conversations I've endured. If Pete has a solution to the problem, something which will enable the average person to talk for an indefinite period of time without becoming boring, he should communicate it to the world as soon as possible.

I like talking to people, but any group of people must run out of things to say from time to time, and in that situation I believe that it's better to find something interesting to do than to sit around making vacuous conversation. Ideally, the real world should provide interesting things to do which are also useful; the proliferation of games and other "pointless" recreations (sports, many non-competitive hobbies) indicates that it doesn't work out like that.

CT: Jonathan's dislike of pubs is well-known, and one that I find a little difficult to understand. I used to feel the same way, actually, but over the last couple of years I've visited quite a few as a result of attending Diplomacy con: from the bad (The Albion, out half-a-mile down the road) through the indifferent to the excellent Weaver's Arms in Hinckley, justly acclaimed as the Best Pub in t'World ( - by the hardcore anyway). I wouldn't claim that even a good pub will suddenly make boring people fascinating (nor would Pete, I think), but I would suggest that it is a good place to meet and chat/socialise. Birks was extolling the virtues of Over and Under, on which I totally agree: it is a simple game, requiring no particular ability at darts (to play, not to win), and able to accommodate a large number of people. It therefore enables everyone to play, and doesn't result in people being "left out" - or shouldn't. For those reasons, darts will always be a popular con and pub game. Boring people should find it easier, incidentally, since one tends to talk briefly to most people, rather than having extended conversations.

On the general point about pubs, all I can say is that I thought that having a "con pub" at Polycon contributed greatly to the event's success, and enabled me to meet with, and talk to, many more people than in the SU building - where my attempts to talk with a number of people were frustrated by their being involved in complicated games

JPRP: It's ironic that Pete blasts games players while mumbling nostalgically about the game of darts - a game requiring coordination rather than intelligence, and as a topic of conversation duller than most fantasy or wargames. The virtue of darts is that it's so undemanding that anyone can join in, even when drunk; but why should anyone want to? I've thrown a few darts in my time - in my childhood I once owned a dartboard - and although it's obviously habit-forming it does strike me as a complete waste of time, offering no useful exercise either to the mind or the body. If you enjoy it, fair enough, but that argument will justify anything, even D & D. I find the sight of a group of darts players standing around gawping at the little

arrows going plonk... plonk... plonk... no more attractive or edifying than the sight of a group of D & D players huddled over their eighteen-sided dice. Obviously, each activity has some mysterious appeal to those who pursue it, but Pete's discrimination between one game and another is absurdly partisan.

CT: Come on, Jonathan. If we ignore the "mysterious appeal" of darts, the fact remains that it is far better suited to cons, for precisely the reasons you give. The fact that so many people play the game demonstrates that the appeal isn't that mysterious, though obviously not everyone will enjoy playing it. As for being a dull topic of conversation, I'm glad to say that few people do discuss games of darts afterwards as they do with other games: 8th-level Rice Krispies monsters, hexes, and 6NT redoubled, 4 light because of a bad Spades break seem to constantly crop up in conversation, unfortunately.

JRRP: On the question of zine-trading, I've always thought that this is a ridiculous arrangement, justifiable only if editors attach a high cost to accounting. I think you're confusing the argument about passing costs on to subscribers with the argument about credit-swapping versus simple trading. The latter argument has nothing to do with the former: it affects the distribution of costs among zines, not the total amount of costs. If you pass on costs, then subscribers as a whole pay the same whether you use simple trading or credit-swap, but if you use simple trading then subscribers to cheap zines pay less and subscribers to expensive zines pay more. The effect is to make it more difficult for expensive zines to survive; why then do you support such a policy?

CT: I agree with all you say, Jonathan. If I were a logical person, I would creditswap, and only with a limited number of zines. I'm not going to, though it's something I have thought about, where once I rejected it out of hand. The extra few pence I might gain would have to offset against the extra time spent on admin, and I don't honestly think that it would be worth it. Illogical, perhaps, but true.

JRRP: I thought "Silent Running" was a ludicrously implausible film, but I've already detailed my criticisms in DAS 14 (a great letter all about the problems of putting forests into space). As for "Dark Star", if good SF films were common then one could describe it as a minor film of no great consequence; but as good SF films are virtually unheard of, even a good minor film like "Dark Star" is something to write home about. I enjoyed it.

On music, I agree that there is creative enthusiasm in the field of pop singles. However, as far as I can tell the only successful albums are collections of pop singles put out by groups in the singles charts. This is all very well as far as it goes, but it doesn't go very far. There has been an anti-intellectual backlash in rock music which, although probably past its peak, still seems to hold sway. Or maybe it's just that I don't hear the good albums because there aren't any decent radio programmes left to play them. Bring back Anne Nightingale and Alan Black's Review Programme, I say. As for this John Peel fellow, off with his head.

CT: The state of radio in this country is a disgrace. Radio 1 has only three decent disc-jockeys: Peel, Anne Nightingale, Mike Read and Paul Gambaccini, of whom only two have daily shows, one of which is on MW mono only. Capital Radio's daily Rock Show is spoiled by the dj's habit of only ever playing one track from each album.

Of course there are successful albums other than the singles compilations, though I would agree that "concept albums" seem to be a thing of the past, not altogether a bad thing, I feel. It's also true that the singles market is now very important again, after a period when all 'serious' rock was on albums and a different type of music was to be found on singles. I'm sure that's healthier all round, and was very pleased to see the new Jam single enter the national Top 100 at Number One. A track that's not on the album, as well.





Before I get started on my main subject, I thought I'd list the TV I've watched in the last week.

Tuesday 18th: Armchair Thriller, Time of My Life, Yesterday's Witness (on Randolph Hearst), Omnibus (on Roger Corman). Wed 19th: - (I was at the Lamb) Thur 20th: Tomorrow's World, Top of the Pops,

Armchair Thriller, end of the BAFTA Awards, What the Papers Say. Friday 21st: Therese Raquin (interrupted by Soap) Friday Night, Saturday Morning with Terry Wogan. Sat 22nd: Tiswas,

On the Ball, Milton Friedman, Playhouse. Sunday 23rd: Family Fortunes, Law and Order. Monday 24th: Yes, Minister and about 20 minutes of the Peter Sellers movie.

Well, wasn't that boring. As you may have gathered, it's now Tuesday: I've just watched the second episode of "Time of My Life", the BBC's new sitcom, which is supposed to be a British version of Soap; a suggestion that is far funnier than the show. Unfortunately, the standard of British TV comedy is very low indeed, with a few honourable exceptions: Python and its various spin-offs most notably, with oddities such as Reginald Perrin occasionally brightening things up.

Of late, only Not the Nine O'Clock News and Yes, Minister have shown any originality or wit at all. Unfortunately I missed most of the first series of NtNOCN, and even the compilation Not the Least of Not the Nine O'Clock News. Fortunately it was repeated last week, and I was impressed: Rowan Atkinson is indeed a star of the future. There's a new series starting next week, and I'll be watching.

Yes, Minister is that very rare creature, the intelligent sitcom (horrible word). It's about the struggles between a new Minister (Paul Eddington) and his Permanent Secretary (Nigel Hawthorne) plus the Civil Servants under his control. Superb performances by the two leading actors and a well-written and informed script combine to very good effect. The writers have gone to great trouble to make it look authentic (though there are odd errors that jar as a result - in the first episode they referred to 'Page 235 Column B' of Hansard, when there are actually column, not page, numbers).

It is set in a fictional Department, with no mention made either of the party in Government or the sex of the Prime Minister, which is reasonable enough, though I tend to try and spot references to real events as a result - they only mention things that happened at least twenty years ago - history rather than current affairs!

I'm fairly sure that it captures the essence of the relationship between Politicians and Civil Servants, though it's difficult to be sure about the details, obviously. It's probably true to say that it takes the Civil Service between a year and eighteen months to "train" an incoming administration to do what it wants. How many governments have started with radical policies, only to quietly drop them and follow the orthodox approach favoured by the Civil Service. Politics becomes a little irrelevant really, doesn't it?

I read somewhere that Paul Channon, the Minister for the Civil Service, greets his Civil Servants collectively as "Humphrey" (Hawthorne's character) these days!

Unfortunately, the TV companies continue to churn out mindless sitcoms by the ton, relying on stereotyped characters and hackneyed scripts. I often think that there could quite a funny series set in a Department Store, but it certainly isn't "Are You Being Served". For reasons which seem rather obscure right now, I did watch one or two of the last series, and was amazed by the small number of "jokes" that were recycled ad infinitum. The only performance that is even worth mentioning is that of the actor who plays the 80-year old boss - Mr Grace? Good sitcoms have several parts that good, and performances to match ("Soap" has at least twenty!!), plus intelligent scripts. Anyone can get laughs from the stereotypes that inhabit it, Mind Your Language, or a million others: no originality or inventiveness is required. I sometimes seriously wonder whether the studio audience were watching the same programme - or are they paid on a piece-time rate - so much per burst of laughter?

Reluctant as I am to go on about "Soap" again, I reckon that it sets standards by which all sitcoms (ugh) should be judged. The storyline is inventive (to say the least), the characters are bizarre - yet somehow believable, and the dialogue is brilliant in parts, good throughout. No character is ever ridiculed in the cheap and nasty way that most ITV sitcoms achieve, and most are portrayed sympathetically. This causes the audience to react very strangely: "serious" scenes are played in complete silence, and applause or audible disappointment are quite common. Unfortunately I can't give examples without giving away the plot as well, but it's quite something to watch, I assure you. Susan Harris (who writes it) clearly puts a lot of thought into developing the characters: Elaine, for example, started off as one of the nastiest characters, getting steadily more unpleasant as time went by, and was then transformed into a very nice person. Having won the audience's approval she was promptly kidnapped!! Obviously that would have had little dramatic effect if she had still been a nasty piece of work.

Perhaps "Soap" is just too good, and leads me to expect too much from the rest of the genre. Perhaps most British TV comedy is so truly abysmal that "Soap" appears better than it actually is. Who knows (who cares?)

Seems logical to move from TV to Radio, so that's what I'll do. My mention of naughty illegal radio stations a few issues back was marred by the incorrect info that I gave. Thameside Radio broadcasts on 90.2 MHz from 7 to 10 each Sunday evening - an even better bet now that Radio 1 is losing its programmes at that time.

Also on Sunday evening there's a very strange programme that I'd recommend you check out. LBC is London "News & Information" commercial station, and it's pretty awful: most of its output consists of frequent news bulletins and tedious phone-ins. It can't even get the news right, and frequently makes major errors of one sort or another. Basically, it is not a very good station.

I suppose it's a streak of masochism that attracts me to phone-ins, but I also live in hope that one day I'll find a good one. When LBC started, it had "Nightline" from Midnight to 4 each morning, with Adrian Love amongst others, which I used to regular listen to whilst drifting off to sleep. Much later, the same station had Bryn Jones, who was taken off by the IBA for left-wing bias (!!). Both had the ability to make phone-ins interesting.

Now there's Jeremy Beadle, again on LBC, who is a natural phone-in presenter. It's impossible to describe his style, but suffice to say that he's extraordinarily good at using people to entertain his audience. Basically, he'll do anything if it'll get a laugh or a reaction from the audience! Apparently, his show generates more response than anything else on the station, which is hardly surprising when you consider what else they've got!

Not to everyone's tastes, obviously, but worth a listen to find out. Sundays evenings from 10 to 1, London Broadcasting (97.3 MHz/ 261m 1151 KHz)

Readers of Greatest Hits will have noticed that its diminutive editor has offered to make tapes from his record collection for readers. I'm not sure, but I think it might very well be illegal to do this, but it seems to have caught on..... If anyone's interested in a similar arrangement, get in touch. I've already had a regga tape from Rob Chapman, who has already set up a similar arrangement himself.

I can, of course, tape from the radio as well, so if anyone wants to hear anything from the local stations I'll see what I can do. I would be interested to hear tapes of other stations, preferably in stereo. One particular programme of which I would like to borrow a recording is the first series of the Hitch Hiker's Guide, or perhaps the record of same.

My tape deck is Dolby (obviously) and I normally use BASF Chrome tapes. I also have an open-reel deck, which makes it possible to duplicate cassettes - so if anyone lends me a cassette I can make a copy and return the original - the quality isn't quite so good, but it isn't bad.

### Gladgrind Folds

Mere months after the demise of Pigmy, Co. Durham's other Diplomacy zine, Mr Gladgrind has given up the unequal struggle against coffee and biscuits. Mr John R. H. Miller (2), a retired Bank Clerk now "studying" at one of Durham's lesser colleges, told our reporter than he was 'sick as a parrot', but felt that his subscribers had suffered enough already. The future of Crosstalk, which Mr Miller edits with someone's who name currently escapes me, seems in some doubt - though the general opinion is that it will continue.

### TSR Hobbies (UK) Ltd.

For reasons which aren't exactly clear at this moment in time, your editor has been sent publicity material from the above-mentioned company. Since it is not his normal policy to publicise fantasy games, it would ordinarily have gone straight into the bin. However, it's a new venture, and Don Turnbull has done a lot for the Diplomacy hobby..... So, TSR Hobbies (UK) Ltd, trading from 5 Greenlands, Red Cross Lane, Cambridge, CB2 2QY are new UK agents for all TSR games, and can supply them by mail order. I note that "Awful Green Things from Outer Space", an amusing little game is now available only as a "Family - Boxed Game" at a brand new price of £5.50.

I'm not entirely sure what sort of organization the company is, though the fact that their trading address is Don's home may give some indication.... He seems to have started quite well, and I'll watch this venture with interest.

### Second Hand News

I gather that Tantalus is folding, which is hardly surprising since the current issue is many months overdue. It's a pity, because I'm sure Don could have produced some really interesting issues if he'd persevered with the zine. He didn't, and that's that - no doubt he will stay in the hobby, and I'm sure that he'll fold Tantalus responsibly.

### Here We Go Again

The first issue of this infamous zine has actually been produced. It's a "novice package", and is therefore packed with information and advice for anyone new to the hobby. Most of the articles are sensible, and well-written, so I'd highly recommend it to anyone who wants basic information about the hobby. My only reservations are about the future of the zine - there's an obvious limit to the amount that can be written actually about Diplomacy, and Steve could well have problems persuading his contributors to do their bit (all of them are zine editors, so they will already be spending a lot of time on the hobby). Now that Don Brown has folded T, perhaps he'll become a regular contributor?

My one complaint is that he has made rather too many factual errors, and perpetuated some common myths (the one about the old Ethil being so good, for example - have you seen any of them, Steve? They're good, but nothing special). If HWGA is to become a British Diplomacy World, a little more attention to detail is required.

Actually, I've got another complaint, but a less serious one: A3 reduced to A4 is terrible to read - the lines of print are too wide, and too close together. A double-column format would be easier to read, and look more attractive to boot. HWGA costs 35p per issue from Steve Agar, 3 North Road, Chester-le-Street, Durham.

Quick plug for Noccon II, at the Northolt Community Centre, Church Road, Northolt, from the 6th to 8th of June. £1 + £1.50 per night, to Graham Box, 15 Earls Crescent, Wealdstone, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 1XL. I'll almost certainly be there, and all manner of other ruffians have threatend to attend, so it should be awful. If you know what's good for you, you'll stay well away from Northolt over that weekend.....

This is Megalomania 26, from Chris Tringham of 25 Auckland Road, London SE19 2DR, who is getting rather tired of typing this nonsense every time. Phoned orders are not encouraged, though I'll accept them on the Thursday or Friday immediately preceding the deadline, from about 7 pm onwards. The number? Oh, yes - 01-653 1532. Printing is by the Hanway Print Centre, 106 Essex Road, London N1, who can be reached on 01-226 6868.

Subscriptions are available at 8/- £3, 14/- £5, or 40p, for a single issue. Overseas subscribers pay 50p per issue. Games of Diplomacy are available, to be run in the zine by John Dodds at £1.50 (which I think is on the low side, but won't be increased until I can be sure that players do get a satisfactory service).

# Deadline

Saturday 26th April, first post. Phoned orders may be accepted at any time up till the games are adjudicated, entirely at the GM's discretion.

EDITORIAL (from page 2). It seems most logical for me to continue with the current system - a mixture of 4 and 5-week deadlines as appropriate. I will do my best to cut the turnaround time, but I can make no guarantees: if it takes me 10 days to produce an issue (as seems to be the case), I'll delay it by a week rather than reduce the size. It would help me if letters and articles (hint) could arrive in plenty of time, so that as much as possible can be done in advance.

# State of the Hobby

My long, and fascinating, piece on this subject has fallen victim to the shortage of space in this issue. I am therefore forced to summarise it in a few lines. The position basically is that Paul Simpkins will be running a new "introductory service", to channel recruits from the Diplomacy box flyer into the hobby. Pete Birks has offered to write an introductory package, though Agar is inevitably extolling the virtues of his HWGA "special issue" in preference. There are problems, naturally: Philmar have to be persuaded to include the new flyer, and some arrangement will have to be reached with Richard Sharp, to deal with the applications he has already received and is likely to receive in the future. This, of course, would help to placate Philmar, so I suggest that it should be the first priority for that reason. As I said last time, there must be serious doubts about the future of Games & Puzzles, a very important route into the hobby over the last few years. There's also the question of what the effect of a massive influx of people into the hobby would be, and whether it's desirable anyway. I really will print that article next time.

And that is just about it - I apologize for the slightly cramped appearance, and the reduction in the number of illustrations this time - I've just got too much stuff for a zine this size. Still - I shall press on regardless!

# MR. DIPLOMATS

